

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-27 (**Cancelled**).

28. (**New**) A machine for making and packaging articles containing an infusion product, the machine being defined by a production line and comprising:

a plurality of operating stations arranged in a series relative to each other and designed to make at least one continuous strip by superposing and sealing two webs of filter paper with measured quantities or charges of infusion product interposed between the two webs at regular intervals;

at least one cutting station for dividing the strip to form a succession of individual articles; and

at least one built-in packaging station for packaging groups of the articles in packets,

wherein the built-in packaging station is located immediately downstream of the cutting station and includes a packaging device for forming stacks of articles and a transfer device which guides the stacks of articles along a vertical feed path section in a direction that is transverse relative to the production line and feeds the stacks of articles into the packets, and

wherein each packet is formed on the transfer device and positioned with an inlet opening at a lower end of the transfer device.

29. (**New**) A machine for making and packaging articles containing an infusion product, the machine being defined by a production line and comprising:

a plurality of operating stations arranged in a series relative to each other and designed to make at least one continuous strip by superposing and

sealing two webs of filter paper with measured quantities or charges of infusion product interposed between the two webs at regular intervals;

at least one cutting station for dividing the strip to form a succession of individual articles; and

at least one built-in packaging station for packaging groups of the articles in packets,

wherein the built-in packaging station is located immediately downstream of the cutting station and includes a packaging device for forming stacks of articles and a transfer device which guides the stacks of articles along a vertical feed path section in a direction that is transverse relative to the production line and feeds the stacks of articles into the packets, and

wherein the packaging device includes a bucket that moves to and from the transfer device, and wherein the bucket is equipped with at least one seat for receiving at least one of the stacks of articles.

30. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, wherein the bucket has an open bottom bounded by a circular ledge on which an article forming a bottom of a corresponding stack is placed.

31. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, wherein the bucket includes a pair of adjacent seats for receiving two stacks of articles, and wherein each seat has an open bottom bounded by a circular ledge on which an article forming a bottom of a corresponding stack is placed.

32. **(New)** The machine according to claim 31, wherein the pair of adjacent seats in the bucket form, in cross section, a binocular-shaped profile that is open in a middle region where the pair of adjacent seats meet and extend along an entire height of the bucket.

33. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, wherein a head end of the bucket has a vertical opening extending along an entire height of the bucket.

34. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, wherein the at least one seat in the bucket has a respective slot defined at an upper region thereof to partially accommodate at least a portion of means for stabilising and stacking the articles.

35. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, wherein the bucket is equipped with actuating means for moving the packaging device in both directions along a path transverse relative to the vertical feed path section and to an article stacking axis, and which imparts reciprocating motion to the bucket.

36. **(New)** The machine according to claim 35, wherein the actuating means includes a rigid rod that is attached to a rear end of the bucket and is slidably driven along the path.

37. **(New)** The machine according to claim 35, wherein the actuating means positions at least one seat of a pair of adjacent seats under the packaging station, and wherein the bucket is provided with the pair of adjacent seats.

38. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, comprising two adjacent packaging stations for simultaneously packaging the articles.

39. **(New)** The machine according to claim 29, further comprising a fixed, rigid table located at a stacking area below a base of the packaging device and forming a temporary base, wherein the table has a free end with a through opening formed therein to permit passage of a base plate therethrough.

40. **(New)** A machine for making and packaging articles containing an infusion product, the machine being defined by a production line and comprising:

a plurality of operating stations arranged in a series relative to each other and designed to make at least one continuous strip by superposing and sealing two webs of filter paper with measured quantities or charges of infusion product interposed between the two webs at regular intervals;

at least one cutting station for dividing the strip to form a succession of individual articles; and

at least one built-in packaging station for packaging groups of the articles in packets,

wherein the built-in packaging station is located immediately downstream of the cutting station and includes a packaging device for forming stacks of articles and a transfer device which guides the stacks of articles along a vertical feed path section in a direction that is transverse relative to the production line and feeds the stacks of articles into the packets, and

wherein the packaging station comprises:

a pair of vertically sliding, pre-stacking levers acting at a vertical stacking channel defined by four vertical guides; and

a second carriage, which moves vertically, interacting with the pair of pre-stacking levers, and which has a base plate and an upper retaining fork acting in the stacking channel to receive a predetermined number of stacked articles from the pair of pre-stacking levers and to place the stack of articles in the packaging device.

41. **(New)** The machine according to claim 40, wherein each lever of the pair of pre-stacking levers is positioned opposite each other on both sides of the stacking channel and is movable between a working position in

which the pre-stacking levers are close together and engage the stacking channel to support the articles in the stacking channel, and an idle position in which the stacking levers are apart to enable the articles to move down rapidly, wherein the pair of pre-stacking levers are linked to a third, power-driven carriage that is vertically movable to enable the pair of pre-stacking levers to move downward at a relatively slow rate when in the working position and to move upward at a relatively fast rate when in the idle position.

42. **(New)** The machine according to claim 40, wherein the second carriage faces the pair of pre-stacking levers on the opposite side of the stacking channel, and wherein the base plate that supports the articles is located at a bottom end of the second carriage and is associated with a free end of a C-shaped supporting pin protruding laterally from the second carriage to enable the base plate to be positioned at a centre of the stacking channel and passing through a side of the stacking channel.

43. **(New)** The machine according to claim 40, wherein the retaining fork is positioned at a front of the stacking channel and is movable into the stacking channel, and wherein the retaining fork is pivoted toward the second carriage and is movable between an idle position in which the retaining fork is positioned at an angle outside the stacking channel, and a working position in which the retaining fork is positioned inside the stacking channel and holds the stack of articles in place until the articles are placed in the packaging device.

44. **(New)** The machine according to claim 41, wherein the second carriage includes drive means that move in step with the third carriage along a stacking axis to permit the following steps to be performed:

stacking of a first group of articles on the pair of pre-stacking levers as the pair of pre-stacking levers are moving vertically downward in the working position;

lifting the base plate to position the base plate under the pair of pre-stacking levers when the first group of articles is stacked;

resting the articles on the base plate, when the pair of pre-stacking levers are in the idle position;

then moving the pair of pre-stacking levers upward;

completing stacking a predetermined quantity of the articles on the base plate as the base plate moves downward and the retaining fork moves to the working position on an uppermost article of the stack of the articles; and

placing the stack of articles in the packaging device.

45. **(New)** A machine for making and packaging articles containing an infusion product, the machine being defined by a production line and comprising:

a plurality of operating stations arranged in a series relative to each other and designed to make at least one continuous strip by superposing and sealing two webs of filter paper with measured quantities or charges of infusion product interposed between the two webs at regular intervals;

at least one cutting station for dividing the strip to form a succession of individual articles; and

at least one built-in packaging station for packaging groups of the articles in packets,

wherein the built-in packaging station is located immediately downstream of the cutting station and includes a packaging device for forming stacks of articles and a transfer device which guides the stacks of articles along a vertical feed path section in a direction that is transverse relative to the production line and feeds the stacks of articles into the packets, and

wherein the transfer device comprises guide and controlled downfeed means which comprise:

a vertical channel formed by a hollow element, wherein the channel has at least one zone for the passage of the articles; and

an element for pushing/accompanying the articles, which is positioned above the hollow element and which is vertically mobile between an idle end position where the element is away from an opening at a top of the hollow element so as to enable the packaging device to be positioned at the top opening, and a working end position where the element guides and pushes the articles, sliding along an inside of the channel so as to position the articles in the packet.

46. **(New)** The machine according to claim 45, wherein a cross-sectional profile of the channel defines two adjacent circular zones.

47. **(New)** The machine according to claim 46, wherein the two circular zones have a diameter that is smaller than a maximum dimension of the articles to control and guide the articles as the articles are pushed down along the channel.

48. **(New)** The machine according to claim 46, wherein the hollow element includes a longitudinal conduit for conveying a fluid positioned centrally between the two circular zones and leading into at least one bottom opening through which the fluid itself is fed into the hollow element in such a way as to blow the fluid onto the articles as the articles move down along the channel.

49. **(New)** The machine according to claim 48, wherein the fluid is nitrogen.

50. **(New)** The machine according to claim 45, wherein each zone of the circular zones has a plurality of radial grooves around a circumference thereof that extend along a full length of the circular zones.

51. **(New)** The machine according to claim 45, wherein the pushing/accompanying element comprises a flat head designed to come into contact with the articles so as to push and guide the articles down the circular zones.

52. **(New)** The machine according to claim 51, wherein the flat head is associated with a vertical rod that slides along guides associated with a vertical column located above the hollow element, wherein the rod is driven by a variable-speed motor positioned at a top end of the column.

53. **(New)** The machine according to claim 45, wherein a sealing and cutting unit is positioned at a lower end of the hollow element and is designed to close the inlet opening of the packet positioned under the hollow element and to simultaneously form the base of a next packet being formed around the hollow element.